DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 288 CS 216 586

AUTHOR Mayo, Wendell
TITLE The Writing Teacher's Second Self.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; Rhetorical Criticism; *Teacher Role; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research; *Writing Teachers
IDENTIFIERS *Implied Authors; Indiana Univ Purdue Univ at Fort Wayne

ABSTRACT

A writing teacher wanted to know how students perceive the second selves (alter-egos or implied authors) that writing teachers infer in their written comments on student writing, whether students saw room for negotiating the role this second self implied for themselves, and whether teachers can exercise control over some of the choices they make in written comments on student papers. First, several rhetorical features of teachers' comments on student manuscripts were defined. These features are point of view, mode of address, comments which deal with form or content, are global or specific, and positive or negative. To determine the kinds of second selves formal written comments on student papers create, 16 intermediate composition students at Indiana University Fort Wayne were asked to write essays in the first person. The essays were divided up and sent to four experienced university writing teachers who were to respond completely in their usual manner. The essays were returned to students for revision, and students were interviewed about the teacher comments. Most students associated comments in the second/third person points of view with a teacher-persona. Students felt that they should adopt comments in the second/third person because they sensed "an unbiased critique." Nearly all students associated comments concerning form with a teacher-persona. Comments considered positive or negative, positive turning negative, or negative turning positive were not clearly associated with either persona. (Contains 6 tables of data, a figure, and 6 references.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

CS

The Writing Teacher's Second Self

Wendell Mayo

Department of English

Bowling Green State Univeristy

Bowling Green, OH 43403

Office: (419) 372-8370

E-mail: wmayo@bgnet.bgsu.edu

ED 429 288

CS216586

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

W. Mayo

The Writing Teacher's Second Self

But need the author be so retiring? I think we're a bit too squeamish about these personal appearances these days.

-Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point, 1928

Do students sense a writing teacher's second self in the process of reading written comments on their essays? Are these second selves students sense important to the ways students approach revising their writing? Over the past decade writers and scholars have addressed these questions in different ways. For example, in her essay, "Responding to Student Writing," Nancy Sommers suggests that teachers of writing "comment on student writing to dramatize the presence of a reader, to help our students become that reader themselves" (170). Although C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon suggest that writing teachers be suspicious of responses that ask students to quest after a teacher's "Ideal Text," like Sommers they also recognize the critical importance of a sense of the writing teacher's second self, a persona which is "insinuated through the reader's commentary" (120). Certainly, if teachers' comments on students' essays create second selves rooted in institutional conceptions of writing, such as the "Ideal Text," E.M. White notes that teachers can also project other selves, selves responsible for "creative misreadings" of students' texts, selves that create alternative perceptions of the possibilities latent in their writing (190).

One of the most complete theoretical accounts of the "second self" in writing is given by Wayne Booth in his 1961 work The Rhetoric of Fiction in which he identifies a second self as a persona, the writer's "alter-ego" or the "Implied Author" (74). Of course, Booth writes of fiction, but the terms he uses to refer to the author's second self are useful: "the created version of the real [author] . . . the sum of the author's [choices]" (74-75). What if a writing teacher makes comments in the first person, second person, or third person? What if comments are interrogative or imperative?

The Writing Teacher's Second Self: A Case Study

I wanted to know how students perceive the second selves that writing teachers infer in their written comments on student writing. For instance, do student writers sense that these second selves are "writerly" or "teacherly?" Do these perceptions by students change given different rhetorical situations and different formal characteristics of the comments they read on their essays? I also wanted to find out whether students felt there was room for negotiating the role this second self implied for themselves. For example, did students feel free to adopt or reject certain kinds of comments and the second selves they imply and still feel that they were good writers? Finally, can writing teachers exercise control over sum of the choices they make in written comments on student papers to help students become better writers? To answer my questions, I defined several rhetorical features of teachers' comments on student manuscripts based on my

experience, theory, and what Andrea Lunsford and others have called key topoi in their initial 1992 national survey of 3,000 student essays marked by teachers ("Data, Analysis, and Methods"). These rhetorical features of comments made by teachers are point of view, mode of address (e.g. declarative, interrogative, or imperative), comments which deal with form or content, comments which are global or specific, and comments which are positive or negative.

1. Method

To determine the kinds of second selves formal written comments on student papers create, I asked eighteen intermediate composition students at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne to write essays in the first person point of view. I asked them to introduce a possible topic for a research paper, then narrate their personal experiences in the topic area in about four typed, double-spaced pages. In a baseline survey half the students identified themselves as experienced writers and half as inexperienced. I divided up students' essays, along with a description of their writing assignment, and sent them to four experienced university teachers of writing, all holding different positions. Two taught writing at Ohio University, one a teaching associate and doctoral candidate, the other a Ph.D. who teaches writing as an adjunct faculty member. Two instructors at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne were also sent student essays, one a full-time member of the writing faculty and the other an associate instructor and student in the master's

program. I asked these instructors to give complete responses in their usual manner and mentioned that students would be revising their essays after receiving their written comments.

I returned manuscripts to students, asked them to read the written feedback, and make revisions based on them. In audio-taped interviews I asked students:

a) Point to a comment that you feel came from the commentator as a teacher, an evaluator and representative of the university. Why did you point to this comment?

b) Point to a comment that you feel came from the commentator as an individual writer like you, not an evaluator or representative of the university. Why did you point to this comment?

c) Point to a comment that you feel you could reject in your revision and still consider yourself to be a good writer. Why did you point to this comment?

d) Point to a comment that you feel you should adopt in your revision or you would not be able to consider yourself a good writer. Why did you point to this comment?

The taped interviews generated about forty pages of transcripts. First, I sorted the comments students pointed to on their marked essays by whether students felt the presence suggested by the comment was teacherly (a teacher-persona) or writerly (a writer-persona). Then I further sorted the comments into the five categories of comments I developed and into specific rhetorical features within those categories, for

instance, into point of view, then first person, second person, or third person omniscient objective. Because, as Robert Brooke suggests, students negotiate their roles as writers and readers from among those projected or available to them (21-26), I also examined the transcripts to find relationships between rhetorical features within the same five categories and students' sense that they were free to adopt or reject a given comment.

2. Results

Point of View:

Most students associated comments on their papers in the second person and third person (omniscient objective) points of view with a teacher-persona. Conversely, the writer-persona was associated with comments in the first and second person.

Table 1

Commentator's Second Self

as a Function of Point of View

Person	Persona	
	Teacher (%)	Writer (%)
First	-	40
Second	63	47
Third	37	13
Total	100	100

Some students pointed to comments that were fragments of sentences or words, which I interpreted to be in the third person, for example, "AWK," or "This is awkward." One student pointing to this remark identified it as a teacher-persona and commented, "I don't even know what 'AWK' is. . . . I know my friends wouldn't write anything like that." While this may be an instance of simple miscommunication, other students felt similar comments in the second or third person points of view also reflected a teacher-persona: "These are the kinds of things teachers pick on," one student noted, "overuse of certain words, or misuse . . . but that's good. That's what teachers are for."

In contrast, students sensed a writer-persona if a comment was in the first or second person points of view. Concerning a comment in the first person, one student remarked, "[The commentator] was more interested in what I was doing and who I was rather than the grammatical content or structural content." After pointing to a comment in the second person, another student said, "[The comment] was not anything to do with the . . . paper itself, but a question to me [to explain] myself."

While students were more likely to associate comments in the first and second person points of view with a writer-persona, they were also more likely to reject them when contemplating revision. Conversely, as Table 2 illustrates, students seemed more willing to adopt comments in the third person.

Table 2

Willingness to Adopt or Reject Comment as a Function of Point of View

Person	Adopt (%)	Reject (%)
First	8	21
Second	54	64
Third	38	15
Total	100	100

Students felt that they should adopt comments in the second and third person because they sensed, as one student noted, "[It was] and unbiased critique." But students felt free to reject some comments in the first person because, as one student said, "[It sounded like] opinion. This is my piece and I wrote it."

The results of this portion of the study raise important questions about written comments themselves. Students' tendencies to reject comments in the first person associated with a writer-persona reinforces the notion that a commentators' text is an important site of negotiation between reader and writer--a potential starting point, but not an end. What many writing teachers have come to know instinctively is true: it is not enough to mark papers and simply send students off to revise them. Some form of one-to-one tutoring is important.

Form or Content:

Nearly all students associated comments concerning form with a teacher-persona. Conversely, most students associated a writer-persona with comments concerning content.

Table 3

Commentator's Second Self

as a Function of Form or Content

Form or Content	Persona	
	Teacher (%)	Writer (%)
Form	94	40
Content	6	60
Total	100	100

One student linked a comment to a writer-persona because the commentator "had curiosity" about the content of the paper and did not focus on "technical faulting." Another student simply felt the comment was made by a writer-persona because the commentator "liked my topic."

Table 4 indicates that students were as likely to adopt or reject a comment on form as one on content.

Table 4

Willingness to Adopt or Reject Comment as a Function of Form or Content

Form/Content	Adopt (%)	Reject (%)
Form	85	79
Content	15	21
Total	100	100

But most students who associated a writer-persona with comments in the first or second person points of view also pointed to comments that concerned content. This not only suggests that the commentator's text is an important initial site for meaning and identity negotiation, but that content is as well.

Mode of Address:

While Table 5 shows that most students felt that declarative comments suggest to them a teacher-persona or a writer-persona, the interesting result is that most students tended to associate imperative comments with a teacher-persona and interrogative comments with a writer-persona.

Table 5

Commentator's Second Self

as a Function of Mode of Address

Mode	Persona	
	Teacher (%)	Writer (%)
Declarative	75	60
Imperative	19	7
Interrogative	6	33
Total	100	100

Table 6 further indicates that 21% of the students would reject comments that were interrogative in nature compared to just 8% who would adopt them in revision.

Table 6

Willingness to Adopt or Reject Comment

as a Function of Mode of Address

Mode	Adopt (%)	Reject (%)
Declarative	69	50
Imperative	23	29
Interrogative	8	21
Total	100	100

Two Other Rhetorical Choices:

On the whole, students did not closely associate global versus specific comments with a teacher-persona or writer-persona. Comments considered positive or negative, positive turning negative, or negative turning positive were also not clearly associated with either persona. Nor did students' choices clearly suggest that they would adopt or reject comments of these types.

3. Conclusion

Figure 1 illustrates the overall theoretical implications of the case study.

Figure 1

Implied Persona. Rhetorical Features of Comments, and Tendency to Adopt or Reject Comments

Teacher-Persona	Writer-Persona
-2nd/3rd Person	-1st/2nd Person
-Comments on Form	-Comments on Content
-Declarative/Imperative	-Interrogative
-Tendency to Adopt	-Tendency to Reject

So what does this all mean? For myself, I discovered that I can likely control the second self I construct for students through my written comments on their writing. For instance, if I wish to seem "teacherly," directly instructing a student to understand and adopt my suggestion, I'll likely write my comment in second

or third person, declarative or imperative mode. If I wish at points in a student's text to seem "writerly," to open it to later negotiation in a conference or tutoring session, I will likely use first or second person, interrogative mode: the student will be inclined to reject the comment anyway, as one student in my study put it: "That wasn't the voice I was looking for." Overall, I discovered that most students will begin to develop their voices when writing teachers, in their written comments, give students a better sense of when they are directly teaching writing versus assuming roles as writers themselves in search of voice.

Works Cited

Booth, Wayne C. The Rhetoric of Fiction. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.

Brooke, Robert E. Writing and Sense of Self: Identity Negotiation in Writing Workshops. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991.

Knoblauch, C.H., and Lil Brannon. Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1984.

Lunsford, Andrea A. "Data, Methods, and Analysis." Panel Session: Teachers' Written Comments on Student Essays: A National Study. Forty-Third Annual CCCC Convention. Cincinnati, 20 Mar. 1992.

Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." Teaching Writing: Theories and Practices. Ed. Josephine Koster Tarvers. Boston: Scott Foresman, 1988. 170-77.

White, Edward M. "Post-Structural Literary Criticism and the Response to Student Writing." College Composition and Communication 35 (1984): 186-95.